The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

In the first year of the News-Letter there was a persistent demand from our members that the Church should give a lead in social matters. What some of our correspondents wanted lay outside the function of the News-Letter ; it had not the resources to do the work well and it was not authorised to speak on behalf of a representative Church body. A lead of the kind for which many were looking has now been given.

Three statements, which are the outcome of much hard work and common discussion, have recently been issued. The first is a thirty-two page pamphlet entitled *Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction*,[1] issued under the authority of the Commission of the Churches for International Friendship and Social Responsibility, of which the Archbishop of York is the Chairman. The second is called *The Christian Realm*, a shorter twelve page statement, and is issued by the Church Union.[2] The third (sixteen pages) entitled *Malvern and After* is the report of a committee of industrialists, economists and theologians which was asked to consider certain questions that the Malvern Conference desired to have more fully explored.[3]

Documents of this kind do not lend themselves to comment in the News-Letter. I have tried my hand at indicating their points of agreement and difference and have had to give it up. What could be said within our limits of space would be too brief to convey anything of value to those who do not know the documents and superfluous for those who do. It is also unnecessary, since the expenditure of a shilling will enable any one to possess all three.

Those who have prepared these statements deserve our gratitude. They have helped us to find our bearings by formulating the convictions, principles and aims which should govern the Christian approach to the problems of society. They have provided us with serviceable maps. But to make a journey, we need more than maps. We also need petrol and, having supplied ourselves with petrol and maps, we want to be getting along the road. As the Archbishop of York has pointed out in his preface to *Malvern 1941*,[4] Christian activity in relation to society has to be carried out at three distinct levels. One is the formulation of general principles, with which these documents are in the main concerned. The other two levels, which make even greater demands, must be kept for discussion in a later letter. Having been given good maps, let us be thankful and not spend a disaproportionate amount of our energy in trying to improve them. Above all let us avoid the snare of supposing that when we have laid down principles, and affirmed our belief in them, we have also secured action.

[1] Student Christian Movement Press, 4d.
[2] 238 Abbey House, Westminster, S.W.1, 2d.
[3] The Industrial Christian Fellowship, The Vicarage, The Broadway, Westminster, S.W.1, 2d.
[4] Containing the principal papers presented to the Malvern Conference. Longmans, Green and Co., 10s. 6d.

THE CHURCH IN SWEDEN

At the time of the meeting of the Swedish Church Assembly last November arrangements were made for a joint meeting, which is without precedent, between this supreme legislative body of the Swedish Church and the Swedish Parliament which was sitting at the same time. The joint meeting issued a statement to the Swedish nation urging it to stand unitedly and immovably for national freedom and Christian civilisation. The pronouncement, which bore the personal signatures of the members of the two bodies, reads as follows :

" To the Swedish nation ! All Swedish men and women in this time of violence and disunity are convinced that Swedish unity must be deepened and our freedom must remain untouched. With this in view, nothing is more necessary than that our nation should reconsider its task of carrying on the Christian civilisation inherited from our fathers. We of the Parliament and Church Assembly, gathered in the capital at this fateful hour for our country, have therefore unanimously desired to recall our nation to our common heritage and our common responsibility. Sweden's line is the Christian line. The words of Olaus Petri the Swedish Reformer are still true : ' The Swedes belong to God just as other nations do ; and God gave us our mother tongue '."

The Minister of Cults pointed out in a speech that, while the fresh consideration of the Christian basis of our Western civilisation was influenced by the present situation, it was not determined by this alone, but that a preparation for it had been going on for a long time. He added :

" The rediscovery of Christian truth which is taking place at present in many circles of the Swedish nation is due to a change in the spiritual current far beneath the surface of visible events. The Swedish nation is ready to respond to the Christian message more than it has been for a long time, and expects this message to be presented in such a way that a modern man can really understand it to be the liberating word."

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

A letter reached me recently from Senator Edgar H. Brookes in South Africa, who besides taking a prominent part in the public affairs of the Union has devoted long study to questions of native policy and written an authoritative book on the subject. He expresses his gratitude for what the Christian News-Letter is doing in keeping the idea of the world-wide Church before its readers at a time when powerful forces are working in the contrary direction. He says that one idea has been much in his mind. His thoughts constantly go back to the time, more than a century ago, when Canning, facing reaction in Europe, countered it by recognising the independence of the South American Republics, which had revolted from Spain, and used the famous phrase " I have called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old." It seems to Senator Brookes that this is precisely what has been happening in Asia and Africa as a result of the missionary work of the Church during the last century. At a time when Christianity in Europe is severely tried, it is heartening to remember that it has struck vigorous roots in Asia and Africa. Scattered throughout these continents there is much real Christian faith and genuine self-sacrifice, and much that may keep Christian thinking sane and hopeful. This does not mean that the Church in Africa is free from grave faults. But there are very valuable elements in these younger Churches, which can contribute to the overcoming of any tendencies to disillusionment and discouragement that may exist in the older Churches and to the restoration of the simplicity, sanity and constructive optimism that are the marks of a living Christianity.

WHITE AND BLACK IN AFRICA

As last week's Supplement was going to press General Smuts made a striking speech on the same theme in Cape Town. He said (as reported by the correspondent of *The Times* in its issue of January 23rd) :

Formerly there appeared only two possible courses in native policy—complete equality or permanent European " top-dogism." A new principle had emerged in recent years and had been enshrined in the League—that of trusteeship. This concept had raised native policy from the area of politics into the region of morality and ethics. Trusteeship implied that the trustee regarded the rights of his ward as sacred rights. South Africa had failed in many respects. She had tried segregation, but segregation had failed. Native health, housing, and nutrition had been shamefully deficient. These problems had to be tackled. He learnt that great mutual respect had grown up between the South African troops and the native troops in the north. That was a good basis for the future. South Africa's hope was that Bantu and European would live together in helpful co-operation. We want to take a holiday from old ideas which have brought nothing but bitterness and strife to our country and try to the best of our ability to fashion a variegated but harmonious race pattern in South Africa.

How difficult is the problem of racial relations where two peoples at widely different stages of social and cultural development inhabit the same geographical area—a situation from which we are happily free in this country and which it is therefore all the more important that we should try to understand—is shown by a statement by the Rev. William Nicol, one of the most respected ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, published in the *South African Outlook*. He explains why it has been found impossible for the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa to co-operate in the Christian Council in South Africa established a few years ago. The principal reason which he gives is the conflict of views on the right relations between white and black. English-speaking missionaries, born overseas, make as little as possible of the differences between the white man and the Native and do not hesitate to invite civilised Natives to stay in their houses and sit at their tables. For the Dutch Community such things are impossible, and the common use by the two races, for example, of the same bath-room is entirely repellent. Mr. Nicol urges the formation of an Afrikans-oriented Missionary Council which would include the various Dutch Reformed Churches and also seek the co-operation of the German missionary societies working in South Africa.

THE VOICE OF SANITY

The following letter speaks for itself. As we read it we feel that in the midst of the madness into which Nazi crimes have plunged the world we are in touch again with the surviving sanities of real life. Crime must meet with retribution; to deny this is to hand the world over to the gangster. But equally to allow passion to blind us to the reality and claim of the humanity of the common man is to hurl ourselves into hell.

" I have just finished with the latest number of the C.N-L. and I should much like to answer to the letter of one of your members which you quote in the paragraph ' Hate.' I feel entitled to do this, being a refugee from Nazi Oppression and having stayed nearly 18 months in the concentration camp of Buchenwald. You may be convinced I know the Nazi methods quite well and I have certainly all reasons to hate these gangsters, but—allow me to give you some personal experiences.

" May 1938 I was, very suddenly in the small hours of a day, taken to the concentration camp, no possibilities at all to make some provisions for my family of five children, most of them of small age. I lived in one of the suburbs, having a big garden with a cottage and a long time after I learned how the neighbours helped my wife to see these days through, bringing food, clothes, all what was needed, the timid-ones dropping their parcels over the fence after dusk. Shall I tell you of the relieving officer who advised my wife how to get the now needed public helps, or the church lay helper (deacon) who, bearing himself the party emblem, never refused any help and assisted with money, goods, etc. The parson, who himself confessed to be a Nazi, not once refused to aid, notwithstanding the fact that I am of Jewish origin, the worst crime existing in Germany.

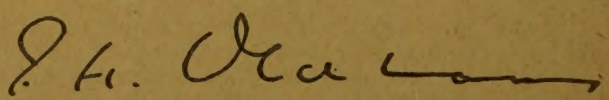
" No, I think, the attitude of your member is not justified when he speaks of the Germans as a whole. I don't wish at all to defend in the least those who have committed and still commit all these horrors, but besides there is still the simple man-in-the-street, who wishes nothing but peace, nothing but the possibility to have his garden, to build his house and to look after his hens and there are thousands of it. Don't answer me ' But he assists these monsters.' What shall he do under the circumstances he is living in ? But, this is a chapter for itself and I don't wish to take more of your precious time."

UNIVERSITIES OF CAPTIVITY

The Master of Balliol has called my attention to a serious omission in the account of " Universities of Captivity " in C.N-L. No. 114. No reference was made in it to the work for prisoners of war of the British Red Cross and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. The department dealing with prisoners of war has been evacuated to Oxford and is housed in the New Bodleian under the energetic leadership of Miss Herdman. A full programme has been developed to enable the prisoners to continue their studies. Several thousands are taking technical courses, including medicine, agriculture, aviation, accountancy and many other subjects. A choice of books is recommended to those undertaking the courses and the books are supplied through the Red Cross. At least 3,000 books are forwarded every month. An illustration of what is being done is given in the following letter, though it relates only to a small percentage of the whole. The writer is Mr. C. S. Lewis, who is known to many of you from the broadcast talks on " What Christians Believe " which he is at present giving on Sundays at 4.45 p.m.

" It would perhaps be going too far to say that British prisoners of war can now read the Oxford Honours School of English in their camps. But they can do something like it. The exact steps by which what was originally envisaged as advice for private study and even recreational reading became the syllabus for something like an honours course on the university model need not be recapitulated. The initiative came from the prisoners. Miss Herdman and I met their wishes by arranging an examination. A number of scholars offered their services as unpaid examiners, and the German authorities consented to allow the forwarding of the prisoners' answers. Finally academic recognition was obtained and a decree has handed over to the Board of the Faculty of English at Oxford the duty of nominating examiners. It has not been possible to offer a degree as the result of this examination. The candidates will be admitted to it without any preliminary examinations, and, of course, they will lack matriculation and residence. The papers will, however, be set and marked according the honours standards (though of course with an eye to certain inevitable limitations of reading) and it is hoped that a good class in this examination, backed by a good report from the examiners, will have a definite practical value after the war. On the cultural side I anticipate, along with much bad work, answers of real interest, for I believe that the necessary restriction on bulky works of criticism, literary history, and apparatus, by forcing the students to concentrate on the texts and to digest them more thoroughly and, above all, to find in one great author their chief commentary on another, may have certain positive advantages over the normal procedure.

Yours sincerely,



P.S. Much will depend after the war on effective co-operation between this country and America and this presupposes the largest possible mutual understanding. A means of keeping in touch with one of the most vigorous and significant tendencies of Christian thought in America is offered by the fortnightly broadsheet *Christianity and Crisis* edited by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr. It can be ordered, and subscriptions renewed, in this country through the Christian News-Letter. The annual subscription is 8s.

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